

THE CRITIC AS ARTIST

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Milton could no longer write he began to sing,
 Who ^{would} match the measures of *Camus* with the measures
 of ^{Samson} *Agonistes*, or of *Paradise Lost* or *Regained*?
 When Milton became blind he composed, as every one should
 compose, with the voice purely, and so the pipe or reed of earlier
 days became that mighty many-stopped organ whose rich
 reverberant music has all the stateliness of Homeric verse, if it
 seeks not to have its swiftness, and is the one imperishable
 inheritance of English literature sweeping through all the ages, because
 above them, and abiding with us ever, being immortal in its
 form. Yes: writing has done much harm to writers. We
 must return to the voice. That must be our test, and perhaps
 then we shall be able to appreciate some of the subtleties of
 Greek art-criticism.

As it now is, we cannot do so. Sometimes, when I have
 written a piece of prose that I have been modest
 enough to consider absolutely free from fault, a dreadful
 thought comes over me that I may have been guilty of the immoral
 effeminacy of using trochaic and tribrachic movements, a crime
 for which a learned critic of the Augustan age censures with
 most just severity the brilliant if somewhat paradoxical
 Hegesias. I grow cold when I think of it, and wonder to
 myself if the admirable ethical effect of the prose of that
 charming writer, who once in a spirit of reckless generosity
 towards the uncultivated portion of our community proclaimed
 the monstrous doctrine that conduct is three-fourths of life, will
 not some day be entirely annihilated by the discovery that the
 paeons have been wrongly placed.

Ernest. Ah! now you are flippant.
Gilbert. Who would not be flippant when he is
 gravely told that the Greeks had no art-critics? I can
 understand it being said that the constructive genius of the Greeks
 lost itself in criticism, but not that the race to whom we owe
 the critical spirit did not criticize. You will not ask me to
 give you a survey of Greek art criticism from Plato to
 Plotinus. The night is too lovely for that, and the moon, if she
 heard us, would put more ashes on her face than are there
 already. But think merely of one perfect little work of aesthetic
 criticism, Aristotle's *Treatise on Poetry*. It is not perfect in
 form, for it is badly written, consisting perhaps of notes
 dotted down for an art lecture, or of isolated fragments destined
 for some larger book, but in temper and treatment it is perfect,
 absolutely.

The ethical effect of art, its importance to
culture, and its
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